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# Latest Winthrop Poll Delves into S.C. Residents' Feelings on Race

## Quick Facts

- S.C. African-American residents surveyed in the latest Winthrop Poll believe that racism is the most important problem facing the country.
- When it comes to placing blame on the state of race relations in South Carolina, 60% of both blacks and whites said both groups are equally to blame. And 70% of all respondents – 69% whites and 73% blacks - said both groups will need to equally change.



Scott Huffman

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – This **Winthrop Poll** delves into how white and black South Carolina residents view various issues differently related to politics and quality of life.

Last summer, S.C. legislators voted to remove the **Confederate battle flag** from the State House grounds. The decision came after nine African-American church members, including the pastor who was a S.C. state senator, were gunned down in their Charleston church in what was viewed as a racially motivated killing.

A majority of S.C. residents continue to think it was the right decision to remove the Confederate battle flag. The **latest Winthrop Poll** showed that 57% of whites and 87% of blacks favored the decision.

S.C. African-American residents surveyed in the latest Winthrop Poll believe that racism is the most important problem facing the country. The issue of race was mentioned by African Americans in South Carolina more often than politicians/government, jobs/unemployment and education, in that order.

Speaking about this survey, **Winthrop Poll Director Scott Huffman** said, "In the past year or so, we have had multiple events that raised conversations about race in South Carolina. The time seemed right to take an accurate measure of where race relations in South Carolina really stand."

**CHECK HERE FOR POLL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.**

## RACIAL ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

When it comes to placing blame on the state of race relations in South Carolina, 60% of both blacks and whites said both groups are equally to blame. And 70% of all respondents – 69% whites and 73% blacks - said both groups will need to equally change.

The **Winthrop Poll** asked how African Americans who seek change in America might best achieve that goal. Half of S.C. African-American residents said working within the system was a better option than challenging or protesting the system (38%). However, black respondents were still notably more likely to advocate protest than whites, only 25% of whom said protest was a better option than working within the system.

African-American residents surveyed said they feel comfortable talking with people of other races about some topics more than others. Three out of four blacks feel very comfortable discussing sports and entertainment, 47% talking about politics and 49% about racial issues.

## MORE RACIAL ISSUES

The Winthrop Poll showed there were some stark differences between how blacks and whites view

the Black Lives Matter movement. Known by its social media hashtag **#BlackLivesMatter**, the national movement has been making headlines as members protest what they see as racially motivated deaths at the hands of police. When asked on a scale from 0 (“cool”) to 100 (“warm”) how they felt about the Black Lives Matter Movement, the average score for African Americans was 75 while the average score for whites was 38.

Using the same scale, African Americans reported feeling 16 degrees “cooler” toward police than white respondents.

When asked to rate race relations in the United States, 41% of S.C. African Americans said it is poor. In comparison, 69% of whites rated race relations as either good or only fair. There was more hope about the Palmetto State where 32% of African-American residents rated the state’s race relations as poor, while 76% of whites rated it as either good or only fair.

The **Winthrop Poll** asked how race relations compared in 2016 to 10, 20, 30 and 40 years ago. Respondents reported improvement. Fifty-eight percent of black and white respondents both said relations were somewhat better or much better than 40 years ago. However, improvement in race relations may have slowed in the past decade as only 1 in 5 of blacks said relations are somewhat better or much better, while 1 in 4 whites said the same thing.

Fewer than half of African-American residents (45%) said they were discriminated in the year because of their race or ethnicity, while only 19% of white residents felt the same way. Yet, two out of every three S.C. blacks feel like whites have a better chance of getting ahead in today’s society. Sixty-three percent of white respondents said they feel like whites and blacks have an equal chance.

By an overwhelming majority (83%), S.C. African Americans believe that public schools spend too little time on the history of African Americans. Among white respondents – 29% said too little, 40% said there was the right amount, and 14% said too much.

## **ECONOMY**

African American residents in S.C. are more optimistic as a whole that the country is headed in the right direction. Nearly 3/4 of the general population said the country is headed in the wrong direction, while only 47% of African Americans had the same opinion.

When asked about their personal financial situation, 61% of all respondents said their finances were improving, while 69% of African-American residents said their situation was better.

Sixty-two percent of S.C. residents think the Palmetto State’s economic conditions are getting better and a majority think the condition of the economy is fairly good.

## **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, GOVERNOR NIKKI HALEY, AND OTHERS**

**President Barack Obama’s approval rating** in South Carolina has ticked up a little bit to 45%, but still lags behind national approval ratings of more than 50%. South Carolina African Americans stand behind the first African-American president with 94% approving of his performance.

Meanwhile, **Congress’ approval rating** by Palmetto State residents remains low at 13%, though 1/4 of African American residents approve of that government body.

**Governor Nikki Haley’s approval rating** was strongly positive among South Carolinians at 59%. While her support among mostly Democratic African Americans is somewhat lower, more than half (51%) approve of how she is doing her job as governor.

“Support among the mostly Democratic African American population for a Republican governor may seem surprising, but it is likely that esteem for her rose among black South Carolinians because of the strong stance she took to remove the Confederate battle flag from the S.C. Statehouse grounds last year,” said Huffmon.

The **General Assembly** received a stamp of approval from 45% of respondents, the same as in the fall of 2015. **U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham**, who ran for president on the GOP ticket, has a 41% approval rating.

The state’s junior senator, **U.S. Sen. Tim Scott**, who is more highly rated among the Republican base, has a 51% approval rating, though African American residents rate the African American senator lower at 38%.

“Racial differences in the approval ratings for our two US senators appear to fall along more standard partisan lines,” Huffmon noted.

## **POLL DEPARTED FROM THE ‘NORM’ IN SEVERAL WAYS**

Huffman reported that the **April 2016 Winthrop Poll** was unusual in several aspects. First, this poll was in the field for three weeks, instead of the standard one week. The reason, as Huffman states on the Methodology page, “is twofold: First, since this poll focused on race relations, we felt the need to get an oversample of African-American residents in S.C. The oversample contains more than twice the number of African American respondents as a typical Winthrop Poll. Second, this poll was much longer than a typical Winthrop Poll. The mean completion time was 75% longer than normal.

“For these reasons, the poll needed to stay in the field longer than normal. HOWEVER, this means no ‘hot button’ questions, such as the ‘bathroom bill,’ the gas tax, ethics reform, and the like. We limited ourselves to core, established topics about which opinion was unlikely to shift dramatically during the time this poll was in the field.” The poll was in the field from April 3 – 24.

The survey of the general population poll contains the opinions of 814 S.C. residents. Results which use “All Respondents” have a margin of error of approximately +/- 3.4% at the 95% confidence level. Results for “Whites Only” come from the general population poll and have a margin of error of approximately +/- 4.1% at the 95% confidence level. Results for “Blacks Only” contain African American respondents from the general population poll, combined with those from African Americans targeted from the “oversample” poll. Results for “Blacks Only” have a margin of error of approximately +/- 4.9% at the 95% confidence level.

Poll phone calls were made during weekday evenings, all day Saturday, and Sunday afternoon and evening to those with landlines and mobile devices.

[CLICK HERE FOR FULL METHODOLOGY STATEMENT.](#)

**POLL FUNDING AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

The Winthrop Poll is paid for by Winthrop University with additional support from [The West Forum on Politics and Policy](#) at Winthrop University. For additional information, or to set up an interview with **Poll Director Scott Huffman**, please contact **Judy Longshaw** at [longshawj@winthrop.edu](mailto:longshawj@winthrop.edu) or 803/323-2404 (office) or 803/984-0586 (cell).

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